

*South of Scotland MSPs,
The Scottish Parliament,
Edinburgh,
EH99 1SP
Via emails only*

Date: 8 October 2026
Our reference: SHRC202682

Dear MSP,

Report: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the South of Scotland

On behalf of the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC), I am writing to share our new report on the current enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights in the South of Scotland. As an MSP representing communities in the region, we hope that the findings will be particularly relevant to your work and to the experiences of your constituents.

This is the second report in our programme of local monitoring of economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights across Scotland, following our 2024 report on the Highlands and Islands. The monitoring work was undertaken under section 4(1)(b) of the Scottish Commission for Human Rights Act 2006.

The report draws on direct testimony from rights holders alongside a review of more than 200 reports and policy documents of local duty bearers. It provides an indicative assessment of where rights are progressing, where they are deteriorating, and where public services and policies appear to fall short of international human rights standards.

The findings demonstrate significant challenges in the enjoyment of ESC rights across the South of Scotland. Across all the rights examined, the SHRC did not find a single right for which all the conditions of adequacy required under international

law are fully met. This means that services, goods and systems are not consistently available, accessible, affordable, acceptable, adaptable or of sufficient quality.

Three issues emerge particularly strongly across the report: accessibility, affordability and fragility. People told us about services which may exist but are difficult or impossible to reach because of transport, geography, digital exclusion, poverty, disability or caring responsibilities. The cost of food, housing, transport, energy and accessing healthcare is also putting significant pressure on people's ability to enjoy their rights. At the same time, third-sector organisations, community groups and volunteers are increasingly filling gaps in public provision, often while themselves dependent on short-term and insecure funding.

The report also identifies serious concerns in particular areas. We found failures to meet the most basic obligations associated with the right to food; serious problems relating to housing affordability, quality and homelessness; and substantial deterioration in access to healthcare. Social care is under significant pressure, while we also found deterioration in education, cultural rights and the right to work.

These findings are also directly relevant to the wider debate about public service reform in Scotland. The experiences shared with us demonstrate why reform should be judged not simply by changes to structures or expenditure, but by whether it makes services more accessible, available and effective in people's everyday lives. Human rights provide a practical framework for doing this and can help ensure that reform leads to better outcomes rather than inadvertently creating new barriers or worsening existing inequalities.

Our recommendations call for urgent action to ensure the most basic human rights standards are met, including action to eradicate rooflessness, alleviate hunger and ensure access to essential food, secure universal access to affordable and quality sexual and reproductive healthcare, and address barriers to participation in cultural life. We also call for clearer, measurable plans from the Scottish Government, local authorities and relevant NHS Boards to improve the accessibility, availability, acceptability and quality of services.

We hope that you will consider the findings in your work as an MSP, including in your engagement with constituents and public bodies and when conducting Parliamentary scrutiny of legislation and budgets. In particular, we hope the report provides useful evidence of the practical impact that decisions about public services and resources can have on people's ability to enjoy their human rights.

Ultimately, we hope this report helps ensure that the voices and experiences of people across the South of Scotland are reflected in decisions made at both local

and national level, and that human rights provide a clear benchmark for improving public services and people's everyday lives.

The SHRC would be very happy to discuss the findings with you, including the evidence gathered from communities in the South of Scotland and how a human rights-based approach can support parliamentary scrutiny and decision-making.

Please invite your team to liaise with chairandexecutive@scottishhumanrights.com and we will be happy to set up some time with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'A. O'Hagan', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Professor Angela O'Hagan
Chair

Enclosed: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the South of Scotland Report